

FLASH FLOOD SAFETY

The heavy rains we are experiencing may be a real nuisance if you are wanting to have a picnic or other outdoor activities. But they can also create some very serious safety hazards. In addition to the dangers of lightning, reduced visibility when driving, and hydroplaning, there is another very serious danger created by heavy rains, which we often tend to overlook – flash floods. They can occur suddenly, with little or no warning, and can be disastrous. Areas such as creek beds, ravines, gulleys, gorges, and culverts can be safe one minute but flooded with raging currents of water the next minute.

Nationwide, flash floods/floods kill about 135 Americans yearly.

Flash flood waters move at incredible speed and with tremendous force. They can roll boulders, tear out trees, and destroy buildings, roads, and bridges. Walls of water can reach 10 to 20 feet in height very quickly and without warning.

It is also essential to keep in mind that river crossings may be deadly during and immediately after heavy rains. Those crossings that may have been totally safe a few days earlier, or even one day earlier, may be extremely dangerous now. Water which is normally only a few inches deep may be several feet deep now. The combination of high waters and swift, powerful current can turn a simple concrete slab into a death trap. Water only a foot deep can displace a 1500-pound vehicle! And even a few inches of swiftly moving water can easily wash a vehicle downstream, leading to disaster.

80% of flood deaths occur in vehicles, and most happen when drivers make a single, fatal mistake - trying to navigate through flood waters.

To avoid becoming injured or even killed by a flash flood or when crossing a river crossing, it is essential that we all know and follow appropriate safety precautions:

- ➡ Keep children from playing around high water or storm drains.
- ▢ Never camp on low ground near mountain creeks, streams or rivers, particularly during threatening weather.
- ▢ Stay out of low areas like canyons, dry washes and drainage canals during severe weather season. If you're along a creek, stream or river, be aware of severe weather upstream. It doesn't have to be raining where you are for flooding to occur.
- ▢ Be familiar with the land features where you live, work, and play. It may be in a low area, near a drainage ditch or small stream, or below a dam. Be prepared!
- ▢ Know where high ground is and how to get there quickly.
- ▢ Watch for the following signs:
 - Unusually hard rain over several hours.
 - Steady substantial rain over several days.
 - Rains in conjunction with a spring thaw.
 - A monsoon or other tropical system affecting your area.
 - Distant thunder. Runoff from a faraway thunderstorm may be headed your way.
 - A weather report of severe weather or a flash flood watch.
 - Water rising rapidly in streams and rivers.

- ▢ When the probability of flash floods is high, avoid low-lying areas. Move to higher ground immediately. Get out of dips, canyons, valleys, and other low-lying areas.
- ▢ When water threatens your campsite, leave immediately. Do not attempt to save your camper, tent, clothing, or other personal belongings.
- ▢ Stay tuned to NOAA Weather Radio for the latest statements, watches and warnings concerning heavy rain and flash flooding in your area.
- ▢ The National Weather Service will issue a Flash Flood Watch when heavy rains may result in flash flooding in a specific area. In this case you should be alert and prepare for the possibility of a flood emergency, which will require immediate action. A Flash Flood Warning will be issued when flash flooding is occurring or is imminent in a specified area. If your locale is placed under a warning, you should move to safe ground immediately.
- ▢ The moment a flash flood warning is issued for your area or when you first realize that a flash flood is imminent, act quickly to save yourself. If advised to evacuate, do so immediately...you may have only seconds.
- ▢ Don't try to outrun a flood on foot. Flash flood waters travel much too fast for you to outrun them.
- ▢ Do not cross flooded roads by foot. The water may be much deeper than you think. Never try to walk or swim through swiftly moving water.
- ▢ Never try to cross flooded roads or other water in a vehicle, whether the water is moving or not. Be extremely careful about crossing river crossings that have water on them, even if there is only a little water. Flood water can wash a vehicle from the roadway and the road under the water may no longer be intact.
- ▢ If your vehicle stalls in rapidly rising water, abandon it immediately and move to higher ground. Rising flood water may engulf and sweep it away.
- ▢ And once the initial threat of flash flooding is over, and the rain has stopped, do not let your guard down. Flash flooding can occur up to 12 hours after a heavy rain event.

Following these guidelines may make the difference between life and death for you or someone else. Flash floods can be devastating. Don't take chances. Know the safety guidelines and follow them.

FROM THE MANSCEN SAFETY OFFICE